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Shattered Lens – The Gaza Flotilla

BY HONEST837REPORTING - DECEMBER 2, 2010

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Reuters' Biased Crops

The Gaza flotilla took place on the first day of HonestReporting's study of the AP, Reuters, and AFP/Getty's coverage of the region. Although the flotilla was undoubtedly the most covered and photographed event involving Israel since the 2008 Gaza War, this study will focus primarily on images originating from Israel and the Palestinian territories – with the exception of Reuters' questionably cropped photos taken on board the flotilla vessel, Mavi Marmara, which could not be ignored in a study of photo bias against Israel by the wire services.

The pictures were published during a period of intense public dispute between Israel and flotilla organizers over which side was responsible for the violence that ended in the deaths of nine flotilla passengers and injuries to seven IDF commandos. Israeli officials produced video evidence of soldiers being attacked viciously as they boarded the Mavi Marmara ship. Weapons were found on board the ship despite flotilla activists claiming to be unarmed.

In the first picture, published in a Turkish newspaper, notice the flotilla activist holding a knife in the lower right corner:

The same photo, originally released by Reuters, has been cropped so that the knife, and potentially evidence of the intentions of those on board the ship, is removed:

Within days, blogger Charles Johnson identified another cropped Reuters photo:

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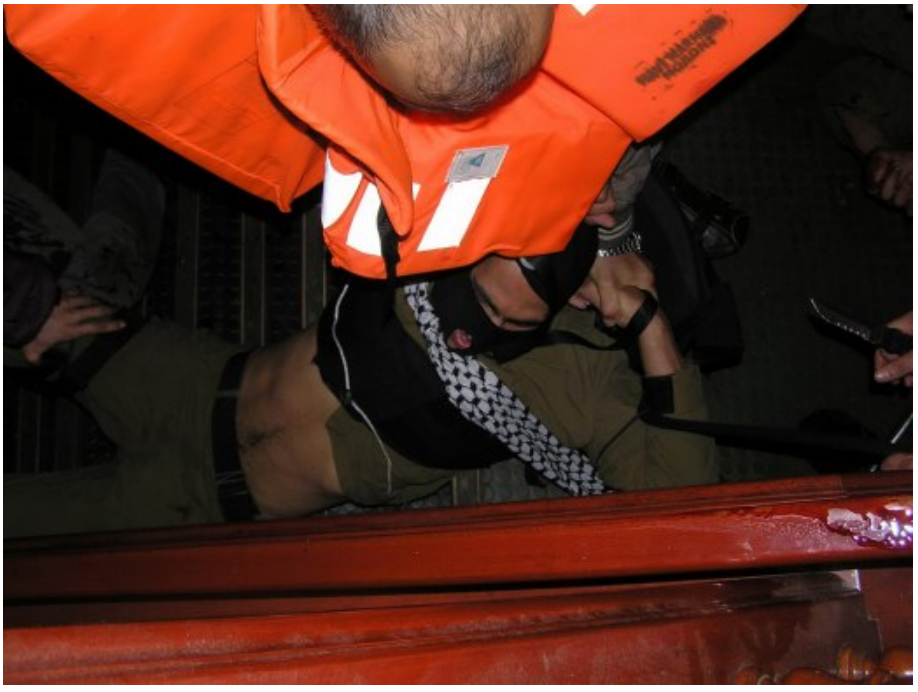
The picture is a cropped version of this photo from the website of the IHH, the Turkish Islamist organization responsible for the flotilla:



Reuters has cropped out a large knife and a big pool of blood as well as another badly injured Israeli soldier lying on the ground:

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Both photos were originally obtained by the Turkish national newspaper Hurryet from the IHH. After Hurryet published the unedited photos, it sent them to the international wire services for distribution across the world. An editor at Reuters, either deliberately or mistakenly, decided to crop them. The version released by Reuters conformed with IHH claims that they were unarmed. When the crops were exposed, Reuters replaced the cropped photos with the originals. By then, however, the cropped photos had already been published in numerous print publications.

The Reuters crops were deemed sufficiently serious to prompt a complaint from Israel's Minister for Public Diplomacy Yuli Edelstein, who demanded an explanation from Tom Glocer, CEO of Thomson Reuters.

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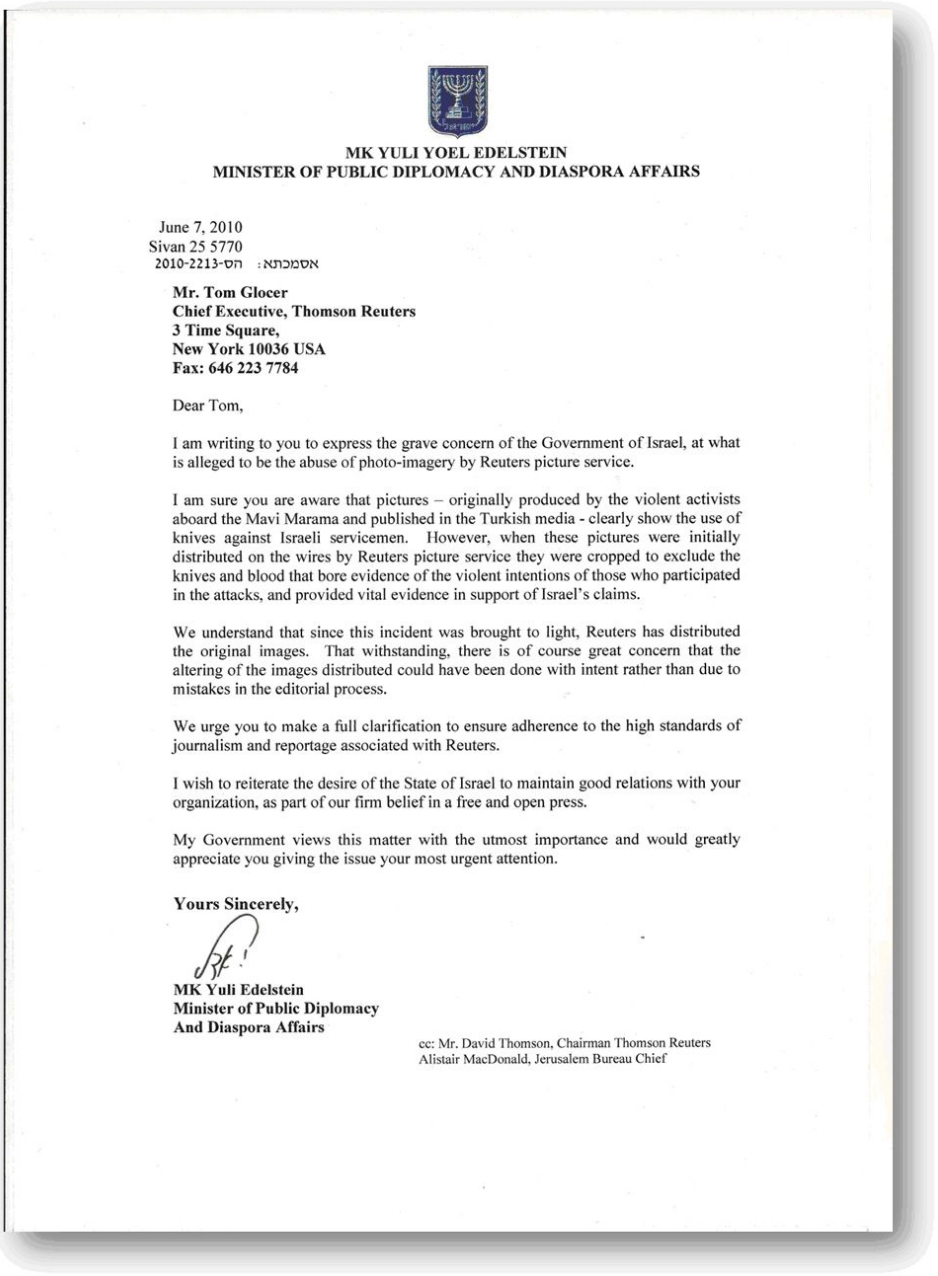

MK YULI YOEL EDELSTEIN
MINISTER OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND DIASPORA AFFAIRS

June 7, 2010
Sivan 25 5770
אסמכתא: חס-2213-2010

Mr. Tom Glocer
Chief Executive, Thomson Reuters
3 Time Square,
New York 10036 USA
Fax: 646 223 7784

Dear Tom,

I am writing to you to express the grave concern of the Government of Israel, at what is alleged to be the abuse of photo-imagery by Reuters picture service.

I am sure you are aware that pictures – originally produced by the violent activists aboard the Mavi Marama and published in the Turkish media - clearly show the use of knives against Israeli servicemen. However, when these pictures were initially distributed on the wires by Reuters picture service they were cropped to exclude the knives and blood that bore evidence of the violent intentions of those who participated in the attacks, and provided vital evidence in support of Israel's claims.

We understand that since this incident was brought to light, Reuters has distributed the original images. That withstanding, there is of course great concern that the altering of the images distributed could have been done with intent rather than due to mistakes in the editorial process.

We urge you to make a full clarification to ensure adherence to the high standards of journalism and reportage associated with Reuters.

I wish to reiterate the desire of the State of Israel to maintain good relations with your organization, as part of our firm belief in a free and open press.

My Government views this matter with the utmost importance and would greatly appreciate you giving the issue your most urgent attention.

Yours Sincerely,

MK Yuli Edelstein
Minister of Public Diplomacy
And Diaspora Affairs

cc: Mr. David Thomson, Chairman Thomson Reuters
Alistair MacDonald, Jerusalem Bureau Chief

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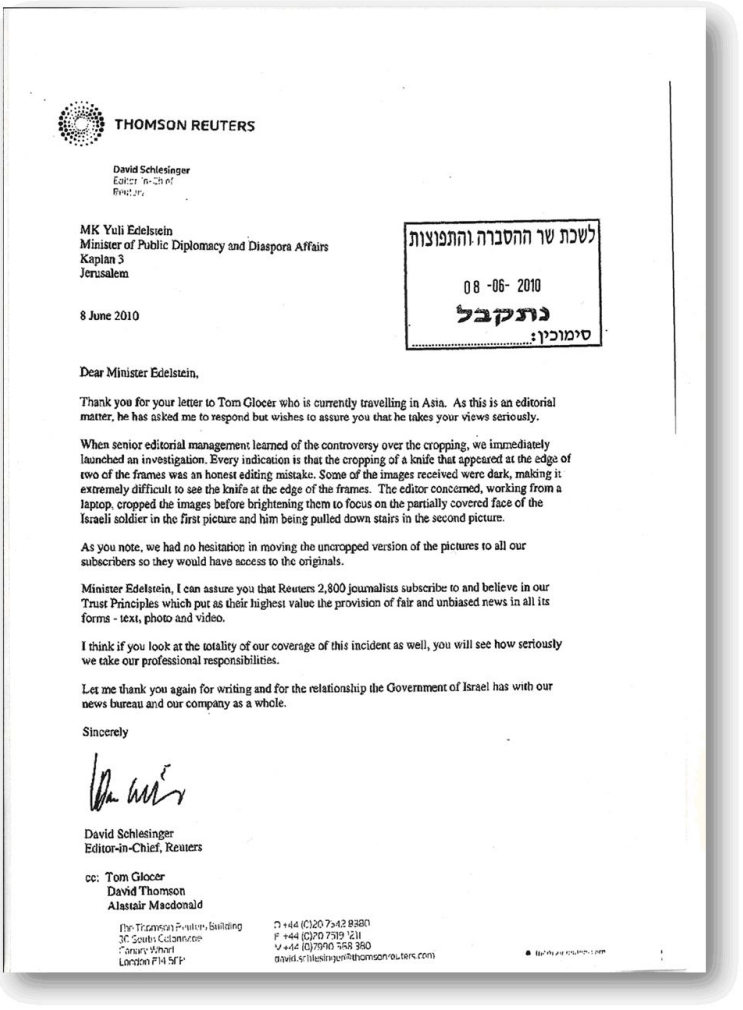
HonestReporting obtained Minister Edelstein's letter, as well as the response from David Schlesinger, Reuters Editor-In-Chief, who claimed the crops were an honest error. A portion of Schlesinger's response is worth noting in the study:

> ***Minister Edelstein, I can assure you that Reuters 2,800 journalists subscribe to and believe in our Trust Principles which put as their highest value the provision of fair and unbiased news in all its forms – text, photo, and video. I think if you look at the totality of our coverage of this incident as well, you will see how seriously we take our professional responsibilities.***



THOMSON REUTERS

David Schlesinger
Editor-in-Chief
Reuters

MK Yuli Edelstein
Minister of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs
Kaplan 3
Jerusalem

לשכת שר ההסברה והתפוצות
08 -06- 2010
נתקבל
סימוכין:

8 June 2010

Dear Minister Edelstein,

Thank you for your letter to Tom Glocer who is currently travelling in Asia. As this is an editorial matter, he has asked me to respond but wishes to assure you that he takes your views seriously.

When senior editorial management learned of the controversy over the cropping, we immediately launched an investigation. Every indication is that the cropping of a knife that appeared at the edge of two of the frames was an honest editing mistake. Some of the images received were dark, making it extremely difficult to see the knife at the edge of the frames. The editor concerned, working from a laptop, cropped the images before brightening them to focus on the partially covered face of the Israeli soldier in the first picture and him being pulled down stairs in the second picture.

As you note, we had no hesitation in moving the uncropped version of the pictures to all our subscribers so they would have access to the originals.

Minister Edelstein, I can assure you that Reuters 2,800 journalists subscribe to and believe in our Trust Principles which put as their highest value the provision of fair and unbiased news in all its forms - text, photo and video.

I think if you look at the totality of our coverage of this incident as well, you will see how seriously we take our professional responsibilities.

Let me thank you again for writing and for the relationship the Government of Israel has with our news bureau and our company as a whole.

Sincerely

David Schlesinger
Editor-in-Chief, Reuters

cc: Tom Glocer
David Thomson
Alastair Macdonald

The Thomson Reuters Building
30 South Colonnade
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david.schlesinger@thomsonreuters.com

From monitoring over 2,000 images from Reuters alone during the course of our three month study, the truth is that Reuters' photo crops are only the tip of the iceberg of flawed and biased coverage of Israel.

Shooting for Dramatic Effect

The rest of this section will focus on images that originated in Israel and the Gaza Strip. One of the most striking features is the lack of balance. There are virtually no images expressing any pro-Israel perspective from the public, even those shot in parts of Israel. Images overwhelmingly portray Israel as the aggressor in the incident.

Few, if any, of these pictures appear worthy of inclusion in responsible coverage of the flotilla. In many cases, they appear to be little more than an opportunity to pour scorn on Israel. The picture below, together with its caption, is a case in point:

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This photo from AFP/Getty in Gaza, taken more than a week after the initial confrontation aboard the Mavi Mamara, cynically exploits the suffering of a Palestinian child. The image bears no relationship to the flotilla, but the caption makes the tenuous link by accusing Israel of preventing the 10,000 tons of mainly medical supplies, hospital equipment and construction materials from reaching Gaza.

In reality, much of the medication had expired and many of the medical supplies had been poorly packaged and were rendered unusable. The caption, however, reinforces the claim that the flotilla was a humanitarian mission, not a political one.

In addition, it is vital to remember that photographers do not operate freely in Gaza which remains under strict Hamas control. It is reasonable to conclude that Hamas played a role in creating the image, either active or passive.

In other cases, such as the photo below, provocative – and completely unrelated – images like Israel's security barrier appear prominently alongside objects of peripheral relation, such as a discarded Turkish flag. The captions then focus attention on events not shown in the photos at all, turning the captions into mini-stories of their own.

Title:	A Palestinian child lies in a children h
Caption:	A Palestinian child lies in a children hospital in Gaza City, on June 8, 2010 a week after Israel prevented a Gaza-bound aid flotilla carrying a total of 10,000 tonnes of cargo, mainly medical supplies, hospital equipment and construction materials, from reaching by sea the blockaded Hamas-run Palestinian territory. AFP PHOTO/MAHMUD HAMS (Photo credit should read MAHMUD HAMS/AFP/Getty Images)

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A Turkish flag lies on the ground as Palestinians, not seen, scuffle with Israeli soldiers, left, at the Kalandia checkpoint between the West Bank city of Ramallah and Jerusalem, Monday, May 31, 2010. Palestinians scuffled with Israeli forces at Kalandia Monday, during a protest against Israeli naval commandos on Monday storming a Gaza-bound flotilla of ships, that left at least 10 passengers dead, and dozens of activists and at least 10 Israeli soldiers wounded. Israeli police said they have heightened security around the country. (AP Photo/Majdi Mohammed)

The next sequence of images was taken in the aftermath of the initial incident aboard the Mavi Marmara.

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A Palestinian protester rides in his wheelchair during a protest against Israel's storming of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla near the controversial Israeli barrier in the West Bank village of Bilin
04/06/2010
System ID: RTR2ERCN
Image ID: GM1E66500G601
Photographer: REUTERS/NIR ELIAS
A Palestinian protester rides in his wheelchair during a protest against Israel's storming of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla near the controversial Israeli barrier in the West Bank village of Bilin near Ramallah June 4, 2010. REUTERS/Nir Elias (WEST BANK - Tags: CIVIL UNREST POLITICS ODDLY)

This gentleman appears in a number of images throughout our three month study. The appearance of the photo is particularly questionable for an international news wire service that claims to be impartial

and wants to “avoid any bias which may stem from control by specific individuals or interests.”

Not only does it serve its purpose by showing a demonstrator who allegedly needs to use a wheelchair wearing his gas mask in the event that the IDF will fire tear gas to disperse the crowd and attack a disabled man, it also manages to incorporate the flotilla together with what the caption describes as “the controversial Israeli barrier in the West Bank village of Bilin near Ramallah,” again making an artificial link that shows Israel in a bad light.

The two pictures below are actually the same image, one from the AP and the other from AFP/Getty. Here we have four particular elements – cancer, woman, child and crying – used to evoke an emotional response.

Only the AFP/Getty caption describes the woman as a cancer patient. However, the AP photo shows the child crying. No explanation is given for the child’s tears, which could have been caused by the rush of photographers trying to take the same picture. Regardless of the reason, the tears contribute to the message that the photo subjects are victims of Israeli aggression.

Title: Palestinian cancer patient Wafa Dahshan,

Caption: Palestinian cancer patient Wafa Dahshan, who was detained with her husband aboard the Gaza-bound flotilla raided by Israel on May 31, 2010, holds her son's hand as other family members greet her upon her arrival in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah through at the border crossing with Egypt on June 5, 2010, after being deported by the Israeli authorities to Turkey where she was receiveing treatment. AFP PHOTO/SAID KHATIB (Photo credit should read SAID KHATIB/AFP/Getty Images)

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Palestinian Wafa Dahshan, center, holds her son Abdullah, right, upon her return to Gaza at the border terminal with Egypt at the southern Gaza town of Rafah on Saturday, June 5, 2010. Dahshan was deported from **Israel** to Jordan following her arrest on one of he ships of the international aid flotilla. Dahshan's husband, Ahmad Dahshan, who also participated in the flotilla headed to Gaza and was halted Monday by the Israeli military commando raid, was deported by the Israeli authorities to Gaza on June 2. (AP Photo/Eyad Baba)

Questioning Israel's Perspective

In addition to local coverage of reactions to the flotilla, the three wire services released photos taken from the IDF's video footage filmed from an army helicopter as Israeli commandos tried to board the Mavi Mamara and were viciously beaten by the passengers. The videos served as Israel's strongest evidence of aggression against its soldiers.

While it is common practice for wire services to indicate that the footage came from an outside source, the language of the captions casts some level of doubt about the contents of the video. Other images, including those supplied by the IHH that were later cropped by Reuters, do not contain the same language.

These are three of the pictures that highlight this example of bias. The first picture comes from Reuters and the second from AP. The third is from a pool photographer, released by the AP.

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A frame grab released by the IDF shows what the IDF says is a pro-Palestinian activist hitting Israeli soldiers
03/06/2010
System ID: RTR2EP4X
Image ID: GM1E6631FAU01
Photographer: REUTERS/Ho New
A frame grab from a video released by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) shows what the IDF says is a pro-Palestinian activist hitting Israeli soldiers with a club-like object upon the arrival of Israeli forces to a Gaza-bound ship May 31, 2010. REUTERS/Handout/IDF (POLITICS CIVIL UNREST) FOR EDITORIAL USE ONLY. NOT FOR SALE FOR MARKETING OR ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

The first caption emphasizes the fact that the image is a frame grab "from an IDF video showing what the IDF says is a pro Palestinian activist hitting Israeli soldiers with a club-like object."

The AP picture states that it "shows what the IDF says is one of several commandos being dropped on to the Mavi Mamara ship."

Even the third image emphasizes that the IDF reviewed this picture before it was cleared for publication. No pictures from the West Bank or **Gaza** indicate they were reviewed by Hamas or any Palestinian body.

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One of several commandos being dropped

FILE - This file photo made from video provided by the Israeli Defense Force on May 31, 2010 shows what the IDF says is one of several commandos being dropped onto the Mavi Marmara ship by helicopter in the Mediterranean Sea. Israeli Defense officials said Monday, July 12, 2010 that Israel's first internal report on the deadly raid against a Gaza-bound flotilla will criticize the planning and intelligence-gathering that preceded the operation, that left nine passengers dead. (AP Photo/Israel Defense Force, File) AP HAS NO WAY OF INDEPENDENTLY VERIFYING THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE VIDEO PROVIDED BY THE ISRAELI DEFENCE FORCE « Read less

In addition, AP uses all capital letters for emphasis to indicate it cannot independently verify the pictures. It is a standard disclaimer for images that weren't produced by the wire service. However, no such disclaimer appears on photos filed by Palestinian stringers.

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In this image reviewed by the Israeli military, showing the view from aboard an Israe Naval vessel, as Israeli Navy soldiers prepare to approach and board as they intercep several boats headed towards the Gaza Strip, while in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea, early Monday May 31, 2010. Israeli naval commandos on Monday stormed a flotilla of ships carrying aid and hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists to the blockaded Gaza Strip, killing at least 10 passengers in a dramatic predawn raid that set off worldwide condemnation and a diplomatic crisis. (AP Photo/Uriel Sinai, Pool)

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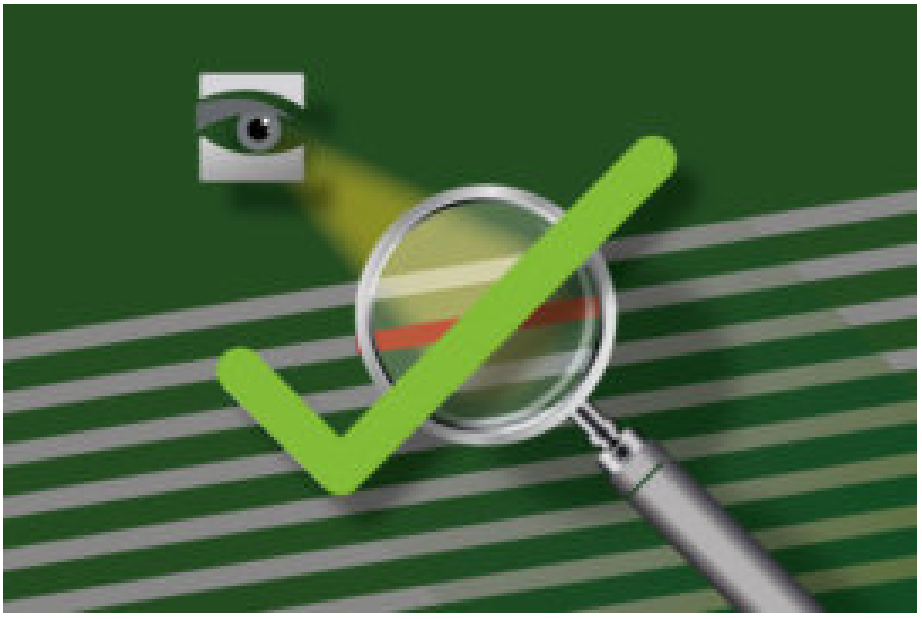

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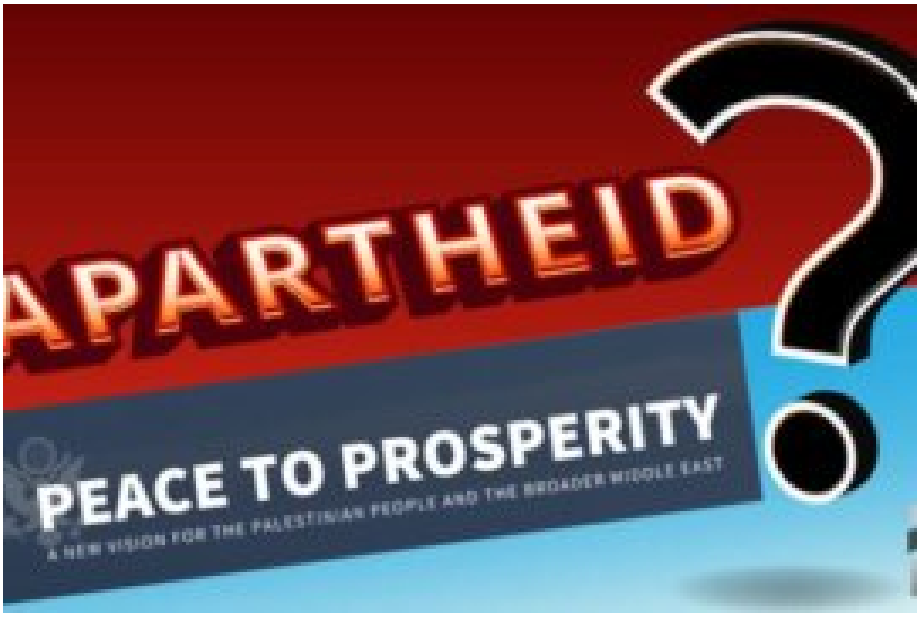

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